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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the issues surrounding the establishment of a system of professional development and training for early childhood workers and practitioners in the United Kingdom. The paper focuses on what needs to be done to accomplish an effective and efficient program of continuing professional development of practitioners. The paper first distinguishes between the definitions of two terms, development and training. The paper then notes that the effect of current policy initiatives raises an anxiety that far from increases training opportunities and requirements. Thus, paying attention to training is a relatively inexpensive strategy for improving quality. The current levels of training and development paint a worrisome picture of an early years work force because of limited and sporadic funding. Most early childhood workers have no access to training at all. There have been a number of strategies, but it is clear that much needs to be done if the British government is to ensure that early childhood workers have a high standard of training. The paper ends with a review of twelve action initiatives that could raise the level of training and development in order to establish child care as a high-status and professional career. Contains 10 references. (AP)

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## DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING:
## "Towards a new career for early childhood professionals"

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## INTRODUCTION

In this paper I shall address the issues surrounding the establishment of a system of professional development and training for early childhood workers which will lead us into the next millennium. I shall not attempt to outline in detail the content of any proposed system of training, rather I shall focus on what needs to be done to transform the existing "under fives muddle" of training into an efficient and effective programme of continuing professional development which is available to,and required of, all early years practitioners. I shall argue that the implementation of such a system is critical if we are to provide all young children in our society with high quality early learning, and as such, should be a priority for policy makers and providers at all levels. This paper will therefore be in six parts:

1. A discussion of the terms **"development"** and **"training"**

2. A consideration of the ways in which **current policy initiatives** in the early years are impacting on the issue of training

3. A review of the evidence which demonstrates the key **importance of training** for the achievement of high quality early learning

4. An examination of **current levels of training and development**

5. A review of **recent training strategies,** both in the UK and elsewhere

6. An agenda for **future action.**

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### 1 .What do we mean by "development" and "training"?

It is important that we are clear in our discussion what we mean by the terms "development" and "training". In this paper, I shall not get embroiled in the debate which differentiates sharply between "training" and "education". The former of which is taken to represent a more vocational, skill based preparation for work, and the latter often referring to a broader, academic and knowledge based preparation for life. In reality, there there is no sharp division, but rather a continuum of experience. When I talk of training I have in mind the period of focussed preparation which is required to equip an individual to enter into their chosen area of professional activity. This is an educational process and will involve training the individual in certain competencies and providing them with a sound knowledge base, to allow them to cope with the complexity of the educative task and the multiplicity of roles they will have to undertake.

"Development" will be taken to mean the ongoing learning and deepening of professional

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knowledge and understanding, which is undertaken once an individual has entered their chosen field of professional activity. "Development" ensures that an individuals knowledge and understanding is updated regularly, and allows the addition of particular areas of expertise and skills to the professional's repertoire.

In this sense both of these terms refer to a learning process undertaken by individuals who have committed themselves to a certain area of professional activity - in this case, the education and care of young children. I shall make a case for these two terms to be viewed as complementary and interrelated parts of a continuum of continuing professional development which begins once an individual expresses their intention to enter into this field of work, and goes on until they leave it.

## 2. The effect of current policy initiatives

The education and care of under fives is firmly on the political agenda. There have been a number of recent reports which have argued convincingly on social, economic and political grounds that there should be a rapid expansion of provision for young children (House of Commons 1989, DES 1990, National Commission 1993, RSA Report 1994, House of Commons 1994). This has also been accompanied by a matched concern that any expansion in the quantity of provision should not be at the expense of quality. Following these calls for action have been a number of policy initiatives aimed at improving the level of provision for under fives. All of these initiatives aim to build on and enhance the diversity of provision which is currently available, including the state, private and voluntary provision and covering a range of sectors, including health, education and welfare. They are also attempting to build in systems of quality control and assurance into the development of provision. The introduction of voucher schemes, the review and implementation of inspection procedures and the promotion of quality improvement strategies are indications that the education and care of the under fives is now being taken seriously by policy makers. These developments must be acknowledged as a significant step forward in the evolution of a national system of education and care for young children.

However, there are also initiatives which accompany these developments which give rise to a concern that the quality of provision will not be assured in the inevitable growth which is occurring. The demise of local authority early years advisory services, the opening up of a myriad of routes into the profession, the deregulation of the service, and the questions that are being raised about the level and necessity of training required to work with young children provide much to concern those who wish to hold onto, and enhance, the quality of service which currently exists.

In all of these initiatives, the issue which permeates the debate, and which causes the most concern, is that of the training and professional development of early childhood workers. It is also the issue which seems to have been most easily dismissed by those anxious to promote quick fix solutions to what is fundamental and long term challenge for our society. In a recent interview on the announcement of the voucher scheme, Gillian Shephard acknowledged the crucial importance of training to the development of quality provision for the young but passed on any responsibility for ensuring this was to take place. She said,

*"There is certainly a need for appropriately trained people to be doing this work, but the voucher scheme, in total worth three quarters of a billion pounds, will enable all providers to pay proper attention to training....Obviously, the qualifications or otherwise of the staff are going to be a major selling point for providers and one of which parents will take careful note."* Gillian Shephard, Nursery World, 14th September 1995.

Other significant players in the political debate do not even acknowledge that training is even necessary,

*"Professional training is certainly not a sufficient condition for the development of an effective*

*curriculum, nor is it absolutely necessary. The good quality provision made by some "untrained" teachers in independent schools counters the view that there is a necessary relationship between high quality teaching a, good quality curricular provision and teacher training."*
Chris Woodhead, Head of OFSTED in a letter to Margaret Lalley, 18th May 1995.

I shall argue that there needs to be a much more proactive stance on training by the Government if we are to ensure that any expansion in provision is of the quality required to benefit children and society in the long term. At present, there is an anxiety that far from increasing training opportunities and requirements, current policy initiatives may well lead to a diminution of them.

### 3. Does training make a difference?

Report after report has stressed the importance of training in the development of policy.

*"Sound standards of teaching will not be developed or sustained without extensive and varied provision for in service training."*
DES 1990.

*" We place particular emphasis on appropriate training, whether in day care facilities, playgroups, nursery schools and classes or primary school infant classes, the education of children under compulsory school age should be the responsibility of staff with an appropriate early years qualification."*
National Commission 1993.

*" Stronger emphasis should be given to the value and status of nursery teachers, the number of places for the initial training of early years teachers should be further increased and early years teaching should,be a priority for in service training."*
House of Commons 1994 para 4.

*"The calibre and training of the professionals who work with children are the key determinants of high quality provision."*
RSA Report 1994, para 6.13.

On what evidence are these views based?

As always, we have no major UK study which has produced evidence of the impact of training on the quality of educational provision for the young. A number of current projects are currently investigating this (Effective Early Learning Project based at Worcester, and the Principles into Practice Project based at Goldsmiths, London) but have yet to publish their findings. A major study in the USA (Whitebrook, Howes and Philips 1989) demonstrated clearly that training made a measurable difference to the quality of early educational experiences offered within an early childhood setting. They found that the quality of children's early learning was severely damaged by massive rates of staff turnover, which was due to poor pay and conditions of work and a total lack of training opportunities. This large scale study provides us with important and valid evidence on the importance of training. Also, a recent study in Australia has shown a link between the educational level of the carer and the educational achievements of the child. The other key evidence we have is from HMI and OFSTED reports which have shown that the quality of educational provision is generally better in LEA nursery schools and classes than in the private and voluntary provision, and this is attributed largely to the fact that this provision has graduate teachers within their staff. However, the current lack of hard UK evidence on the impact of training is worrying. It provides an urgent agenda which research must tackle as soon as possible, as without the evidence it is hard to justify large amounts of money being spent on enhancing training and development opportunities for early childhood workers. Yet. I think we are well placed to argue that paying attention to training is a relatively inexpensive strategy for improving quality.



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## 4. Current levels of training and development

It remains the case in the UK, as elsewhere, that despite the fact that we know unequivocally that this time in a child's development is critical in determining a child's later educational achievement, we allow young children to be cared for and educated by practitioners who have no training specific to under fives, and who receive less than 5 hours annual in service training. Whilst we are beginning to see access to training increasing, courses developing and incentives for development being offered we have a long way to go. The difficulties in enhancing training opportunities are exacerbated by the fact that we have an enormous number of different staffing groups involved in educating the under fives, including teachers, nursery nurses, playgroup workers and childminders, all of which have different initial training requirements and differential access to in service training opportunities. The Rumbold Report (DES 1990) pointed out that in 1990 there were ate least 40 different qualifications of widely differing levels of rigour, gained by modes of study ranging from courses of short duration requiring 2 evenings attendance a week to 4 year degree courses. In the last five years this number will have increased even further.

Research by the Principles into Practice Project (Blenkin and Yue 1994) has shown the results of this fragmented and inequitous situation. It found that:

* many practitioners lack specific preparation for their job:
  65.7% have no specific training for work with children under 8, and even more have no training for children under 5.

* the level of initial training of those who work with under fives is low:
  19.3% have a first degree
  20.9% have NNEB
  0.9% have a higher degree
  10% have no qualification at all

* many practitioners receive little or no in service training:
  only 15% of practitioners are engaged in any form of in service award bearing training

* there are few incentives to encourage practitioners to undertake further training.

This study paints a worrying picture of an early years work force which is nowhere near a graduate profession. It supports the findings of other studies that funding for training is limited and sporadic, and that most early childhood workers have no access to training at all. Even where training exists, incentives to participate are few or non existent. Beyond the level of that required for entry into the work (and for many providers this is minimal), few providers offer a sequence of training activities that are linked to career enhancement steps. What was also revealing in the Goldsmiths study was that once practitioners had qualified for the job they held, they were unlikely to pursue any further award bearing training.

Thus, an alarming picture is painted of a profession where significant numbers of practitioners have no age appropriate training for work at this level, and who undertake training only if it is required for the job and not for its own sake. Blenkin and Yue explain this in terms of a mistrust by practitioners of "academic intellectualism" or at least an indifference towards training opportunities, and their own ability to engage in such development. Added to this I believe there are important gender and family pressures which come into play here. There is also a clear lack of access to appropriately pitched and delivered courses. These are serious issues which must be addressed and the reasons behind them thoroughly explored if we are to ensure that all early years practitioners are appropriately qualified for the job and are able to commit themselves to a programme of continuing professional development.

## 5. Recent training strategies

There have been a number of strategies introduced in the UK and elsewhere which provide us with some indication of how policy to stimulate training and development is beginning to develop. Some of these strategies are set in the broader context of improved training opportunities for all workers, others are specific to improving the training of early years practitioners.

1. The **National Commission** has put forward a strategy which aims for an expansion of education and training for all members of society. They recommend:

* that all adults under the age of 25 who register for a recognised qualification should be given the right to one day a week off work without loss of pay
* that all those over the age of 25 should have the right to 5 paid day's leave per year for recognised off the job education or training
* that all adults should be entitled to the payment of fees for recognised courses and the introduction of an allowance for incidental (non fee) expenses for training at basic or intermediate levels
*that the idea of a "learning account" for individuals be introduced which has a value and which may be logged in at a "learning bank".

They recognise that additional spending will be necessary if this vision is to be achieved but argue that spending on education and training is an investment which is essential if the country is to improve its competitiveness and safeguard its future prosperity. These ideas have been supported by the RSA and the Commission on Social Justice, and have clear implications for early childhood workers, the large proportion of whom are poorly trained.

2. The **system of NVQ's** is developing rapidly and proving popular with students and employers. This articulated and detailed system is one which is based primarily on the achievement of a set of detailed competencies which require the assemblage of certain practical skills and the ability to perform set tasks. There has been some criticism of the programmes of work based training and assessment which needs to be addressed but the system does provide a vehicle for rationalising the complex and diverse set of training schemes available to early childhood workers at present. It may also have a place in providing the key foundation for all those who work with young children, but it is clear that the profession also needs workers who progress in their training beyond competencies. The recent merger of the DFE and the D of E might provide more impetus to the development of a more progressive ladder of training and development and the bridging of the vocational and academic divide in early childhood.

3. The **Teacher Training Agency** has recently announced(Anthea Millett 1995) an extensive review of initial and in service training for early years practitioners, which is likely to extend beyond a narrow focus on teachers only. There are two strands to this review:

* a survey of the £400-500 million of current in service training for schools and an evaluation of how this being delivered and its impact on the quality of teaching and learning

* a review of the options available for a more strategic direction for the continuing professional development of teachers.

The aim is to provide "a national focus for in service training" and "a better targeted system with clearer objectives at every level" so that "time and money is not wasted on inappropriate training" (Millett 1995). The TTA is also undertaking a major consultation of how, with the introduction of the voucher scheme, initial training opportunities for nursery teachers may be expanded and how routes into this may be opened up further to other early childhood workers. While this review may be welcomed as a signal that training for early childhood is being looked at, we must also guard against some of the pressure to downgrade training requirements and


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open up teaching of the young to less well qualified staff.

4. The **Effective Early Learning Project** (Pascal, Bertram et al 1995) based at Worcester College of Higher Education, has developed a nationally applicable system of validated evaluation and development for all early childhood settings. This programme provides a mechanism for validated self evaluation and improvement of settings, but also a vehicle through which all participants receive accredited training in effective early learning. This Project is currently being taken up by nearly half of local authorities in the UK.

From this short review of recent strategies we can see that the need for an expansion in training and development opportunities is beginning to be taken seriously by policy makers in the UK. However, when we look at recent experience elsewhere we can see that giant leaps are taking place in other countries which provide a much more radical agenda for us to consider.

1. In a recent survey of **teacher training for the early years in Europe** (Bertram and Pascal 1995 - in print), it was shown that there is a general move across Europe to increase the length of initial training for those who work with young children to 4 or 5 years, to upgrade such courses to graduate level, to increase the academic and theoretical content of these courses, to link training more firmly to the university sector and to open up access to such courses by providing more support for those who work in the field.

2. In the USA there is a move to **tie higher salaries and better benefits for early childhood workers to the completion of specialist training,** to provide incentives or salary enhancement grants to providers who offer professional development opportunities and provide a programme of quality improvement, and to reward staff who complete specialist training with higher pay and bonuses. For example, the TEACH Project in North Carolina reimburses child care workers for tuition, books and travel, provides release time for training and compensates providers who allow their workers to take courses, giving the worker a 3% rise in salary on completion of such training. The US Army has also introduced mandatory staff training and a career ladder for its early childhood workers, in an attempt to cut down its rate of staff turnover.

3. Italy has introduced **a system of continuing professional development** for all its early childhood workers who are required to undertake ongoing in service training throughout their professional careers.

These are just a few examples of the training initiatives being undertaken around the world where policy makers have decided to make the increase of training and development opportunities for those who educate their young children a priority.

## 6. An agenda for future action

There is clearly much that needs to be done if the UK is to ensure that early childhood workers become part of a profession which provides a high standard of training for those who enter it, opportunities for continuing professional development whilst practising and a career ladder with status and proper recognition to those who possess professional expertise and qualifications. This paper will end with a review of action initiatives which may be employed by those who are seriously considering how to raise the level of training and development for early childhood workers in order to establish the job as a high status and well respected professional career. Reflecting on the pragmatics and practicalities of implementing these possibilities might provide us with an agenda of realisable action for the next decade.

## Possible Action Points

**Action Point 1:**
A requirement for minimal levels of specialist training for all early childhood workers (maybe at NVQ level 3?) which is to be achieved progressively over a set period of time.

**Action Point 2:**
The establishment of the right of, and requirement for, all early childhood workers to undertake 5 days paid annual training throughout their career.

**Action Point 3:**
The development and delineation of a well articulated and clearly understood framework of training and development for early childhood workers, which provides a continuum of professional development and career progression.

**Action Point 4:**
Opening up the routes into award bearing early childhood courses and developing higher level NVQ's, modular degrees specialising in early childhood study which are multidisciplinary and cross the education and care divide.

**Action Point 5:**
The linking of all training and development initiatives to career development within the field.

**Action Point 6:**
The linking of all training and development initiatives to salary levels and bonuses.

**Action Point 7:**
The provision of incentives or grants to early childhood centres and services who provide professional development opportunities and have a programme of quality improvement.

**Action Point 8:**
The targeting of training programmes to those who most need it and compensating those who undertake it.

**Action Point 9:**
The establishment of specialist local advisors who provide and monitor training opportunities for early childhood workers in that area.

**Action Point 10:**
The development and dissemination of the best training materials available at a price that can be afforded and in a way that is convenient.

**Action Point 11:**
The subsidisation of training and development for all early childhood workers by Government and industry.

**Action Point 12:**
The development of public and private partnerships to sponsor providers to put in place training for the early childhood workers in the communities from which they draw their work force.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, it is clear that a radical action is required if we are to look ahead towards the next millennium. The development of a system of professional development and training which will provide the calibre of high quality early childhood professionals required to give children a healthy, sound and effective start to their learning career will not come cheaply, nor will it be achieved overnight. A long term plan of action is required which demands action at all levels and by all involved in making and shaping the decisions that we as a society are taking. This plan of action is long overdue and needs to begin now.

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